

Guidelines for completing the form “Investigation of a Foodborne Outbreak”
Foodborne and Diarrheal Diseases Branch, DBMD, CDC
September 20, 1999

1. *Location of Exposure*

Provide two-letter postal code of the state, and the full name of the county in which exposure took place. If exposure took place in multiple states or counties (such as with a commercial product), list in the Comments section at the bottom of page 1.

2. *Dates*

Indicate date that first known case patient became ill, and date that the first and last known exposure took place. If available, please send a copy of the epidemic curve along with this report form.

3. *Numbers Exposed in Your Jurisdiction*

Provide number of laboratory-confirmed cases and number of presumptive cases. If applicable, also provide an estimate of the total number of ill persons if you suspect that this number exceeds the sum of the laboratory-confirmed and presumptive cases.

4. *Approximate Percentage of Total Cases in Each Age Group*

This item seeks to identify unique patterns of age distribution for the outbreak, as well as to identify age groups most affected. Indicate the approximate percentage of all cases (lab-confirmed and presumptive) in the various age groups listed.

5. *Sex*

Estimate the percentage of males and females, using all cases (laboratory-confirmed and presumptive combined).

6. *Investigation Methods*

Check off all boxes that describe the methods used to investigate this outbreak.

7. *Implicated Food(s)*

List the food item(s) implicated as a result of the investigation. Response to this question should match response to Item 16 on page 3, and should be based on one of the Reasons Suspected given in Item 16.

8. *Etiology*

- A. Identify the bacterium, virus, parasite, or toxin responsible for the outbreak, using the criteria set forth in MMWR 1996 / Vol. 45 / ss-5 / Appendix B. Give as much detail as you have about the organism or toxin.
- B. If more than one etiology was identified, please describe in the Comments section at the bottom of page 1.

- C. Check off all boxes that correspond to the specimen(s) from which the etiologic agent was isolated or identified.

9. *Contributing Factors*

- A. Factors that contribute to the occurrence of outbreaks are classified according to contamination, survival, and proliferation. A factor should be checked only if the investigator has strong evidence that it actually occurred in this outbreak; just because a factor has been cited in similar outbreaks in the past does not mean it was involved in this outbreak. **Contamination factors** relate to how the agent got onto or into the food vehicle. **Proliferation factors** relate to how microbial agents were able to increase in numbers and/or produce toxic products prior to the vehicle being ingested. **Survival factors** refer to processes or steps that should have eliminated or reduced the agent but did not because of one of these factors. Explanations and examples of the codes are provided on page 2 of the form. If the choice of “other” is made for any of the factors, please describe in the Comments section at the bottom of page 1.
- B. If one or more food workers are implicated as the source of contamination, please indicate what evidence was used to support this conclusion. The choice of “prior experience makes this the likely source” is provided for situations when conclusive laboratory and epidemiologic evidence is absent, but other factors may prompt the investigator to suspect the food worker(s). If a food worker is implicated in the absence of laboratory and/or epidemiologic evidence, please explain in the Comments section at the bottom of page 1.

10. *Agency reporting this outbreak*

Indicate the agency reporting the outbreak and the relevant information for the person to contact with questions regarding the outbreak investigation. Provide today’s date, and indicate whether this is the initial report of the outbreak investigation, or a update to a prior report.

11. *Numbers*

For each outcome listed, provide the number of patients with the outcome, and the total number of patients for whom you have such outcome information available. If applicable, list other outcomes (and the relevant numbers) in the blank spaces provided. A list of possible outcomes is provided to the right of the table.

12. *Incubation Period*

Indicate the shortest, longest, and median incubation period, and indicate whether each period is measured in hours or days.

13. *Duration of Acute Illness Among Those Who Recovered*

Indicate the shortest, longest, and median duration of acute illness among those who recovered. Indicate whether each period is measured in hours or days.

14. *If Cohort Investigation Conducted*

For cohort investigations only, report the attack rate. The formula is provided to aid in keeping

our definition of attack rates consistent across investigations.

15. *Implicated Food(s)*

The name of the implicated food alone does not provide sufficient detail when one ingredient of many is the actual source of the agent. Identification of an implicated ingredient(s) provides a basis for identifying ingredients that may be involved in other outbreaks. The contaminated ingredient(s) is the ingredient that actually was contaminated with the agent when such a distinction can be made. Method of preparation refers to common food preparation processes. These methods are common for many different dishes (vehicles), and each method has its own typical steps. By identifying the food safety hazards associated with each method and the frequency with which they occur, appropriate interventions and priorities can be set for whole categories rather than just for a specific food. Reasons suspected should be chosen from the list below the table. A list of codes to be used for the method of preparation is found on page 2 of the form.

16. *Where was Food Prepared?*

Indicate where food was prepared. Check all applicable boxes.

17. *Where was Food Eaten?*

Indicate where suspected/implicated food was eaten. Check all applicable boxes.

18. *Other Available Information*

Indicate what other sources of information are available for this outbreak. References should be cited for published papers.

19. *Remarks*

Describe other important aspects of the outbreak that may not have been reported elsewhere in the form.